DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 453 326 UD 034 201

TITLE	A Report from the Kids Mobility Project.
INSTITUTION	Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Center for Urban and Regional Affairs.; Family Housing Fund, Minneapolis, MN.; Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement.; Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Dept. of Educational Psychology.; Minneapolis Public Schools, MN.
PUB DATE	1998-03-00
NOTE	19p.; Other participants in the Kids Mobility Project include Hennepin County Office of Planning and Development and Community Corrections, Judith Tennebaum, Research and Evaluation, Virginia Craig Communications, and Kittelson & Leadholm Design.
AVAILABLE FROM	Family Housing Fund, Midwest Plaza West, Suite 1650, 801 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis, MN 55402. Tel: 612-375-9644.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Attendance; Elementary Secondary Education; Family Mobility; Housing; *Low Income Groups; Socioeconomic Status; *Student Mobility
IDENTIFIERS	Minneapolis Public Schools MN

ABSTRACT

This report describes the Kids Mobility Project, which was initiated by a group of local planners and researchers from various educational and community organizations in the Minneapolis, Minnesota area who wanted to learn more about the effects of changing residence on student achievement and adjustment. The project undertook two studies and a review of research on student mobility. The first study analyzed school data related to student achievement and mobility. It found that socioeconomic level, race, out-of-state birth, family structure, and attendance had a strong relationship to reading achievement test scores and residential moves. The second study analyzed interviews with 100 mostly low income families about the impact of moving. Families reported relentless and often futile searches for adequate, safe, and affordable housing, especially if they had large families. They were forced to stay with relatives or friends and sometimes experienced homelessness. Many said that frequent moves made it difficult for their children to adjust to new schools, friends, and neighborhoods, resulting in poor school performance and behavior. Followup reports from teachers showed poorer school attendance, school performance, and social and emotional adjustment for children with frequent moves. Recommendations and implications for public policy are presented. (SM)

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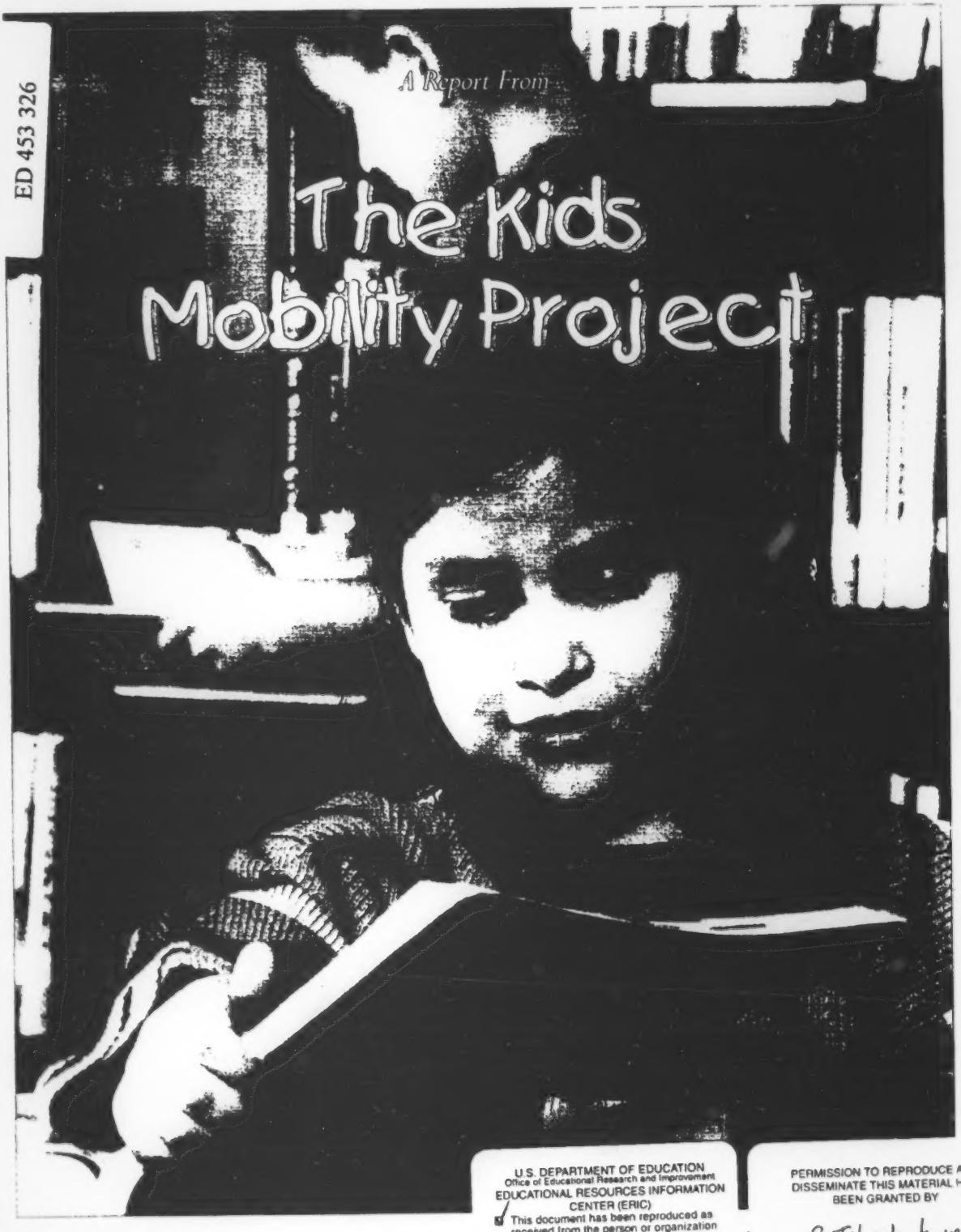
A Report From

The Kids Mobility Project



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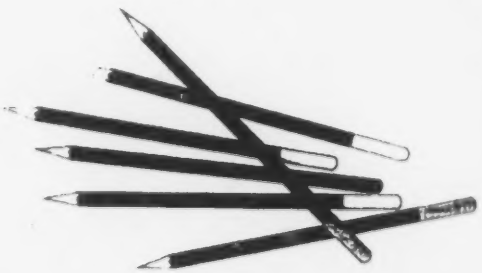
For additional copies of this report contact the Family Housing Fund at (612) 375-9644.

For copies of the appendices of associated research, please call Hennepin County Office of Planning & Development, (612)348-4466.

Appendices include:

- An Extended Review of the Literature:
  The Impact of Frequent Family Moves on School Achievement and Development for Low-Income Children
- Hennepin County Student Data Analysis
- Mobile Children and Families:
  Qualitative and Quantitative Explorations of the Meaning and Impact of Residential Mobility and School Change



KIDS MOBILITY PROJECT REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

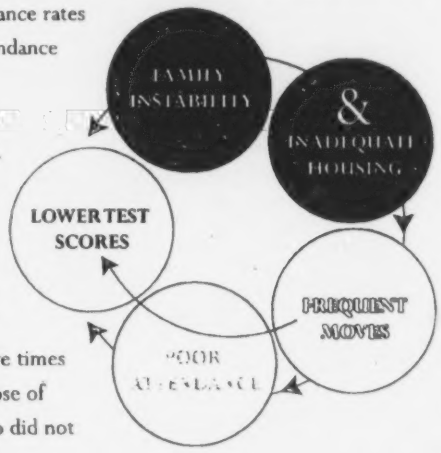
The Kids Mobility Project was initiated by a group of local planners and researchers from a variety of educational and community organizations who wanted to learn more about the effects of changing residence on student achievement and adjustment. Mobility affects one in five Minneapolis students, although 85 percent of elementary students stay in the same school. They asked: Do students who move more often have lower test scores? If so, what factors account for the lower performance of mobile students?

To find the answers, participants in the Project undertook two studies and a review of research on student mobility. The first study analyzed school data related to student achievement and mobility. The second analyzed interviews with 100 mostly low-income families about the impact of moving.

ATTENDANCE LINKED TO MOBILITY AND LOW SCORES

The first study, a quantitative analysis, looked at the relationship between mobility and other factors that may affect student performance for elementary age students. Socioeconomic levels, race, out-of-state birth, family structure and attendance were found to have a strong relationship to reading achievement test scores and to residential moves.

Researchers found that students who moved often had lower attendance rates and that attendance levels were important to achievement. Average reading scores for students who moved three or more times were half those of students who did not move. Students who, on average, were absent 20 percent of the time scored 20 points lower than students who attended school nearly every day. Similar patterns have been found in local and national research.



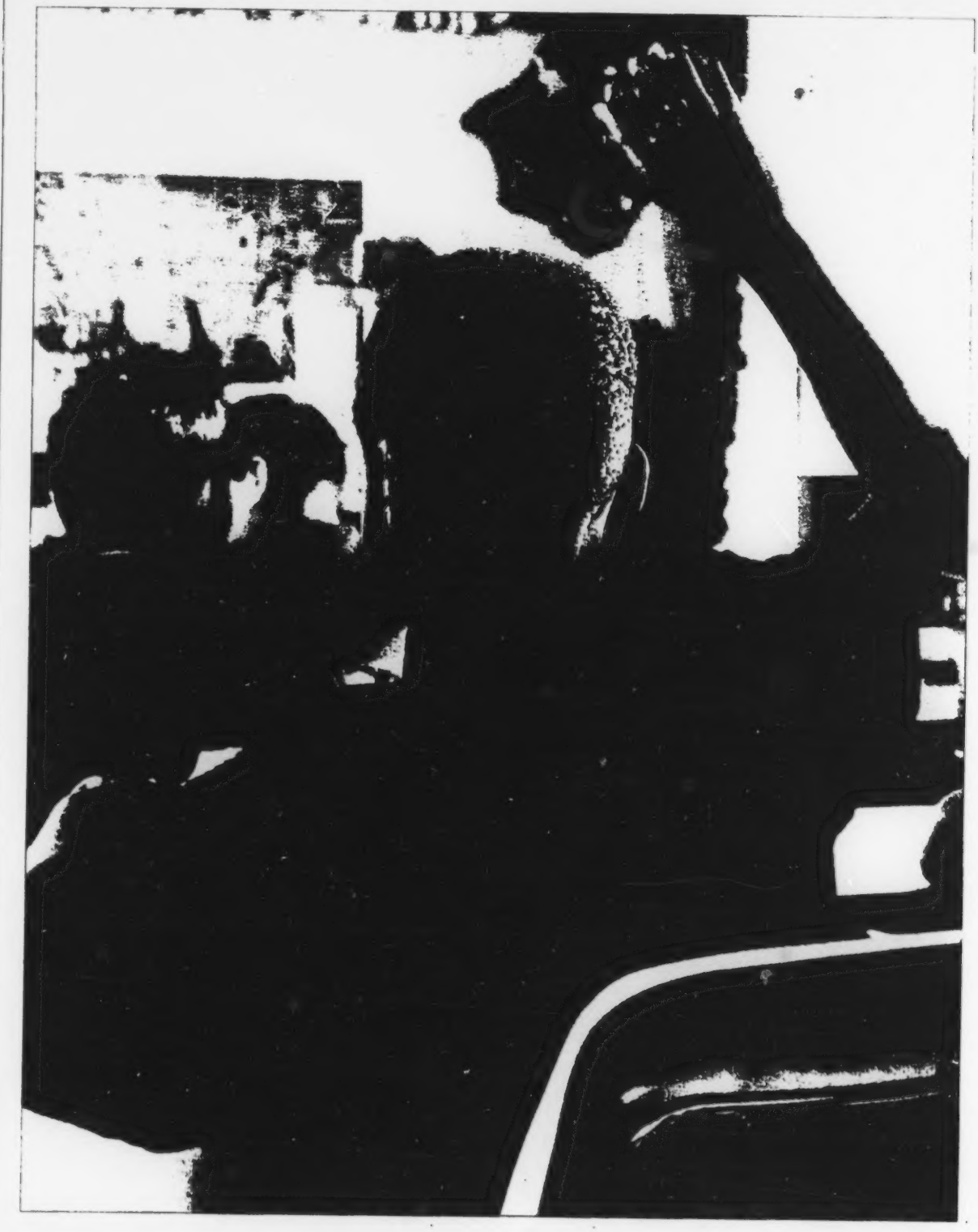
FAMILIES COPE WITH POOR HOUSING AND OTHER STRESSORS

In the qualitative study of 100 families, 75 percent were selected because of a history of frequent and recent moves. Many of those interviewed were coping with stressful life events such as loss of income, divorce, abuse, or poor housing.

Families reported relentless and often futile searches for adequate, safe, and affordable housing, especially if they had large families. Families were forced to stay with relatives or friends and sometimes experienced episodes of homelessness. Many said that frequent moves made it difficult for their children to adjust to new schools, friends and neighborhoods, resulting in poor school performance and behavior. Follow-up reports from teachers showed poorer school attendance, school performance, and social and emotional adjustment for children with frequent moves.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY POLICY MAKERS

Low-income families need easier access to safe, affordable, adequate and available housing so that frequent moves do not become a way of life. Children and families need communities that provide opportunities and services that improve their stability. Although they have not been blind to the issues highlighted by the Kids Mobility Project, schools, social service and community agencies, religious and philanthropic organizations must assess the effectiveness of present efforts and refocus efforts in three areas: attendance, housing and strengthening family stability. Organizations, must make school attendance a strong social value in Minneapolis and build welcoming, stable communities with integrated social services and adequate housing.



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A REPORT FROM THE KIDS MOBILITY PROJECT

"IF I EVER GET A PLACE, I'M STAYING IN IT." *With these words, one mother tearfully summed up her fears and her hopes. After looking for somewhere to live for six months, she thought she might have to lie about how many children she had in order to get a place she could afford. She worried that her children were getting out of control, with behavior and school problems, as the family moved between friends willing to take them in for a short time.*

Residential mobility affects about one of five students in the Minneapolis Public Schools. Some Minneapolis children may move down the block, staying in their school. Others may move in with extended family, to a suburb or a small town, or to the city and back again, as their family situations change.

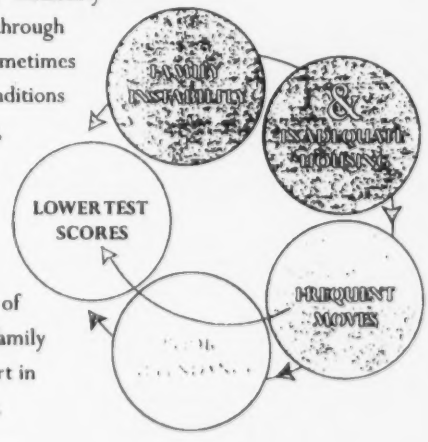
Moving is stressful for anyone, of any age, under any circumstances. For many low-income families moving into or within the City of Minneapolis, stress results from too many moves. Many families move often because they cannot secure quality, affordable housing. In addition, families may already be experiencing other threats to family stability such as chemical dependency, abuse, job loss, death, or divorce.

The results of this residential mobility for students from already-struggling families are multiple—students "fall behind" academically and socially, forfeit social support systems and sometimes act out their feelings of loss in ways that further isolate them.

Two years ago, a group of planners and researchers initiated the Kids Mobility Project to explore the nature of residential mobility and its impact on students in the Minneapolis Public Schools. The goal was to provide sound information from which implications and recommendations could emerge for policies and programs that will help stabilize children and families in Minneapolis.

The Kids Mobility Project researchers suspected that frequent moves affect school performance. They also thought that poor housing and family instability lead to frequent residential moves. To clarify the connections between these factors the group coordinated three studies: 1) a quantitative analysis of mobility and student achievement for a sample of Minneapolis Public Schools students; 2) a study describing the impact of mobility from the point of view of families; and 3) a wide-ranging review of research on student mobility.

What emerged was evidence of strong relationships between family instability, lack of housing, frequent moves, school attendance and school performance. Researchers note that family "instability" may be shown through multiple and sometimes interrelated conditions such as poverty, not living with both parents, chemical dependency, abuse, and lack of connection to family or social support in the community.



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DOES MOVING AFFECT STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

As part of the Kids Mobility Project, the Hennepin County Office of Planning and Development did a quantitative analysis of Minneapolis Public Schools student data. Researchers asked the question: Does changing homes and/or schools have a significant impact on student achievement?

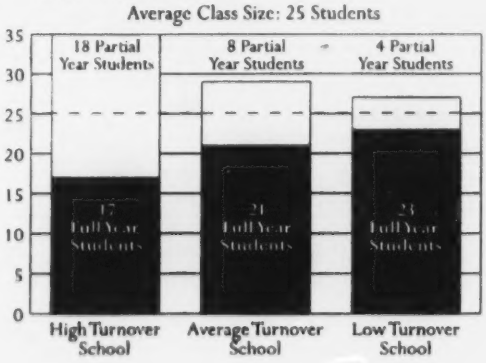
To uncover the answers, the Hennepin County study looked at where students live, results of California Achievement Tests, and month-to-month address and school changes for a random sample of students, grades 1-6 during the 1994-95 school year. (Sample Size: 6,098, about 25% of the grade 1 – 6 population.) The students in the sample mirrored the racial/ethnic mix found for these grade levels in the Minneapolis Public Schools. (8.3% American Indian; 40.4% African American; 11.8% Asian American; 4.1% Hispanic; and 35.4% white.)

Mobility was tracked from November 1994 to June 1995. Researchers looked at who moved, from where, to where, and other demographic questions and then looked for links with student achievement data. Researchers stress that the study results may understate actual mobility because it covers only six and a half months and because not all address changes are reported to school staff.

FACTS ABOUT STABILITY/TURNOVER IN MINNEAPOLIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

- *85% of students stay in the same elementary school throughout the year.*
- *The turnover rate is the rate students entering or leaving a school in individual schools varies from 78% to 8%, with a district average turnover rate of 29%.*

FIGURE 1: 1996/97 EXAMPLES OF CLASSROOM TURNOVER



— *Minneapolis Public Schools Student Information Department*

MOBILE STUDENTS

Twenty-one percent of the students in the analysis moved into the district or changed addresses within the district during the six and a half months of the study period. Another 8.5 percent moved out of the district.

- Transfers *into* the district after school started accounted for half of the students who moved and stayed in the district.
- The school district maintains school continuity for children who move whenever possible, so only 1 in 20 students moving *within* the district needed to change schools because of a residential move.
- Overall, 1 in 3 of the students in the sample were born in other states or countries.

Following are characteristics of those who changed their residence during the study.

Students of color moved far more often than white students.

- Nearly 1 in 3 African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students moved at least once.
- 1 in 6 Asian students moved.
- 1 in 17 white students moved.

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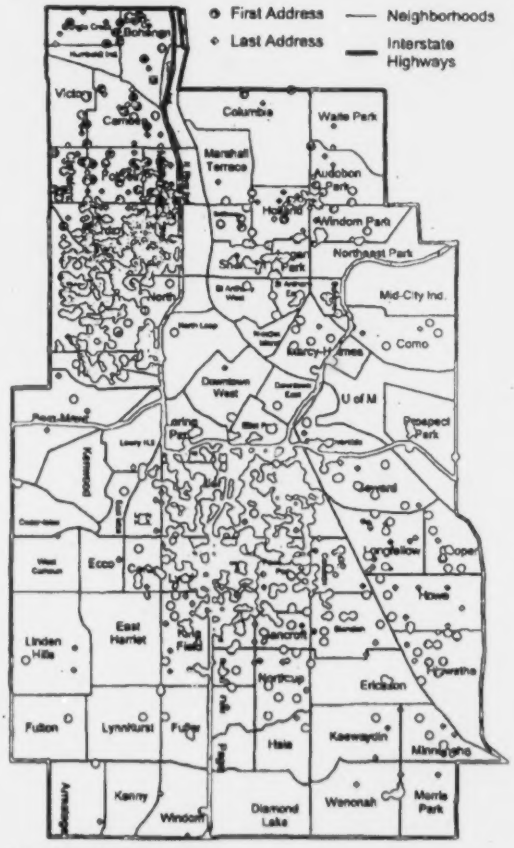
Low-income students who met federal guidelines for free meals were more likely to move.

- 1 in 4 low income students moved one or more times during the study. Only 1 in 10 students who did not qualify for the free lunch program moved.
- 2 in 3 of the students born in other states or countries who moved were low income.

Students not living with both parents moved more often.

- 1 out of 3 students not living with both parents moved.
- 1 in 10 students living with both parents moved.
- 3 of 4 students not born in Minnesota lived with one parent; 1 of 3 students from other countries lived with one parent.

Figure 2: MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS CHANGING ADDRESSES WITHIN MINNEAPOLIS ONLY.



Source: Minneapolis Public Schools
Produced by Hennepin County Office of Planning and Development, March 19, 1996

WHERE DID STUDENTS MOVE?

Researchers found that most of the student residential moves were within a fairly confined area within Minneapolis. (Figure 2)

- Most residential moves occurred in centrally located, low-income areas of Minneapolis.
- Families usually moved short distances, remaining in the same community or a neighboring community: 39% less than a mile, 66% less than two miles.

The fact that families are not moving far may help agencies involved in providing services to highly mobile families focus their efforts.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Did moving cause poor performance? What role did school attendance play? Were there connections between these and other factors such as poverty and family structure?

Mobility. Analysis showed that the greater the number of moves, the lower the average reading score for students in the study.* Average reading scores for those with three or more moves were nearly 20 points lower than those of students who did not move. (Figure 3, p. 8) Researchers noted that other factors that they found were associated with residential mobility have a strong impact on scores, including race, income, out-of-state or out-of-country birth, and family structure.

Minneapolis district data recently released showed that kindergarten through grade 8 students who were not new to the district, but who moved around *within* the district, scored nearly five points lower on reading and eight points lower on math than students who had not moved.

Attendance is Important. Attendance proved to be a strong predictor of performance for students in the study, a correlation found in other local and national research reviewed by the Kids Mobility Project.

** California Achievement Tests in Reading reported as Normal Curve Equivalent scores. The scale ranges from 1-99, with 50 as the national average. The mean is 50 and the standard deviation is 21. Therefore 21 points is equal to one standard deviation, considered a large difference in achievement.*

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Figure 3: READING SCORE BY NUMBER OF RESIDENTIAL MOVES (25% Sample)

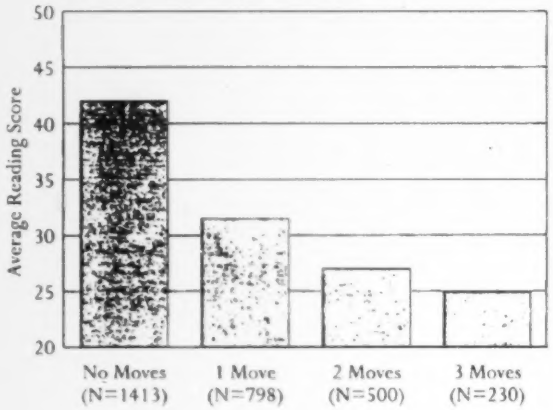


Figure 4: READING SCORE BY ATTENDANCE (25% Sample)

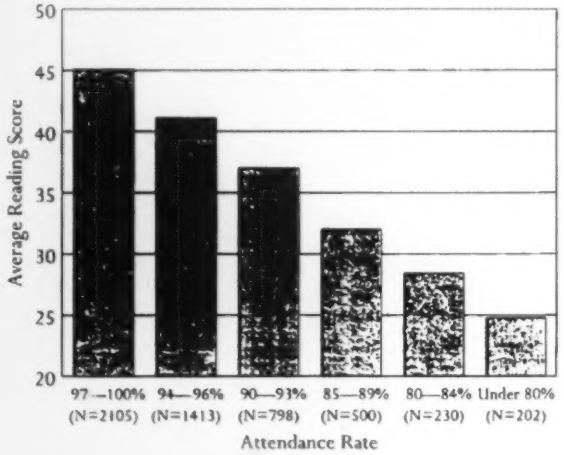
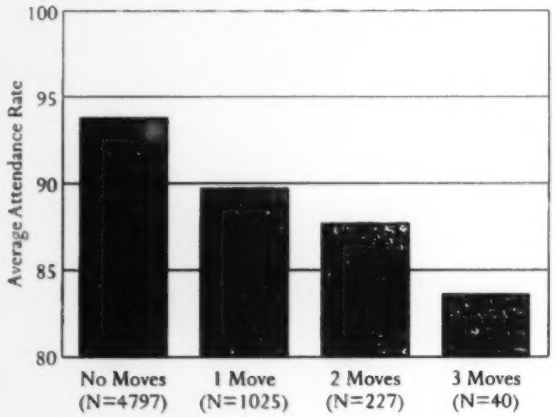


Figure 5: ATTENDANCE RATE BY NUMBER OF RESIDENTIAL MOVES (25% Sample)



- On average, students with nearly perfect attendence outperformed by more than 20 points those who attended less than 80% of the time. (Figure 4)
- Students with nearly perfect attendence made significant one-year gains, while students who only attended 85% of the time or less lost ground.

Because school attendance was such a strong predictor of reading achievement, researchers wanted to see if there was a connection between attendance and the other factors. They discovered that mobility and family structure were related to attendance.

- Students living with both parents had the highest attendance rates.
- The less students moved, the better their attendance rates. Students who did not move during the course of the study had an average attendance rate of 94%. Students with three or more moves dropped to an 84% average rate. (Figure 5)

Multiple Factors Impact Achievement. Using a computer model that looked at many factors at the same time, race, income level, family structure, and out-of-state birth, along with attendance, were the strongest predictors of average reading scores on the California Achievement Test.

- Students eligible for free lunch had average scores 20 points lower than students not participating in the free/reduced price meal program.
- Students living with both parents or with a parent and stepparent showed higher gains in scores over one year and had higher scores overall.
- Average reading scores for students born out-of-state were 10 points lower than Minnesota-born students and two points lower still for those born in other countries.
- Average scores of students of color were more than 20 points lower than scores for white students.

FINDINGS

Although factors other than attendance affect school performance, attendance is a condition more easily changed than family structure, race, income, language, and mobility. Clear evidence of the link of achievement and attendance rates suggests that a focus on improving attendance would

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be beneficial, particularly to students who are also experiencing other risk factors related to achievement such as poverty.

OTHER RESEARCH SUPPORTS LOCAL FINDINGS

National and international research relating to frequent family moves and school success also shows some common patterns similar to those found by the local researchers, according to Judith Tennenbaum, who conducted a literature review sponsored by the Family Housing Fund. Many researchers found that students who changed schools frequently had lower achievement scores than those who did not.

Attendance Identified as Risk Factor in Other Research. Multiple studies cited the poor attendance of low achieving students as a risk factor. The affect of attendance on performance was reinforced locally by Professor Samuel Myers, Roy Wilkins Center for Human Relations and Social Justice at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. His recently completed research shows a strong correlation between attendance and performance on the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests in Reading and Mathematics.

Some research reviewed by Tennenbaum suggests that stability may be more important in primary grades. The cumulative effect of many moves may mean that students cannot achieve at higher levels because they were not in attendance for critical learning opportunities. Some studies also found that mobile students demonstrated poor adjustment and were suspended more often, reducing their time for learning.

Tennenbaum concludes from her review of multiple studies that, although the direct effect of mobility on achievement and adjustment may be relatively small, moving adversely impacts children already facing multiple risk factors. Moves undertaken in the midst of other family crises seem to have the worst effect.

Tennenbaum suggests that more stable housing for families and school strategies to lessen the discontinuity experienced by children when they must change schools could alleviate some of the negative impacts of high mobility on school performance.

A FAMILY VIEW

Do families recognize that frequent moves affect their children's school performance? If moving seems to have a negative effect on attendance and school performance, as multiple studies suggest, why do families move? Do families have a choice?

Dr. Karla Buerkle sought the answers to these more qualitative questions about student mobility in her doctoral thesis research at the University of Minnesota's Department of Educational Psychology. Families with children in grades 1 - 6 were chosen because these are critical developmental years for children.

Buerkle went to the Welcome Center of the Minneapolis Public Schools to find participants for her study. The Welcome Center registers all incoming elementary and middle school students, as well as transfers within the district. Each year, the Welcome Center typically registers 9,500 students who are new or transferring schools, 40 percent in the months of August and September. Participants in the study were typical of Welcome Center clients in that they included high numbers of people of color who were relatively young, poor, and single parents. Her sample of 100 families was chosen to learn more about people who move a lot and is not representative of all families in the district.

Parents answered questionnaires and agreed to face-to-face, in-depth, personal interviews in which they talked about moving. Buerkle chose her sample of 100 families equally from four groups, including families:

1) who were new to the city and had changed residences three or more times in the last year and a half;
2) who had changed residences three or more times in the last year and a half and also changed schools within the city;
3) who had changed residences as frequently as the first two groups, but whose children were able to stay in the same schools; and
4) a stable group that had not moved or changed schools in the past year and a half (low-income for comparison purposes).

Comments from the family interviews are included in this report (in italics) in order to hear families tell their stories in their own words.

THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Buerkle asked families about the impact of mobility on their children's adjustment and school performance. Parents also gave her permission to access student achievement and attendance records and to request psychological competence ratings from their children's teachers.

Parents themselves reported that their children had problems with behavior, emotions, self-esteem, and friends that they attributed to stress associated with frequent family moves.

I want stability for my child. I could see the change and how it was bad for her when we...changed schools; it messed up her education and friendships.

My kids had many school problems before, many related to truancy. Lots of stress, confusion, especially with the kids, welfare-wise. They start to wonder what is going on, why kids aren't in school.

Achievement scores for the students in Buerkle's study were low overall. However, based on student records, school-stable children (Groups 3 and 4) had higher math scores than children who change schools (Groups 1 and 2). Based on teacher ratings, students who were more school-stable also were rated as more competent in a range of psychological skills, especially so in handling separation and independence, relaxing, and playing.

Not surprisingly, the most stable children who had not changed residence in the last year and a half (Group 4) showed the most positive indicators, both academic and psychological. The less stable the family, the more negative the indicators.

Buerkle found that more stable children in Groups 3 and 4 had better attendance—noted as a predictor of stronger school performance in other studies, including the Hennepin County analysis.

WHY MOVE?

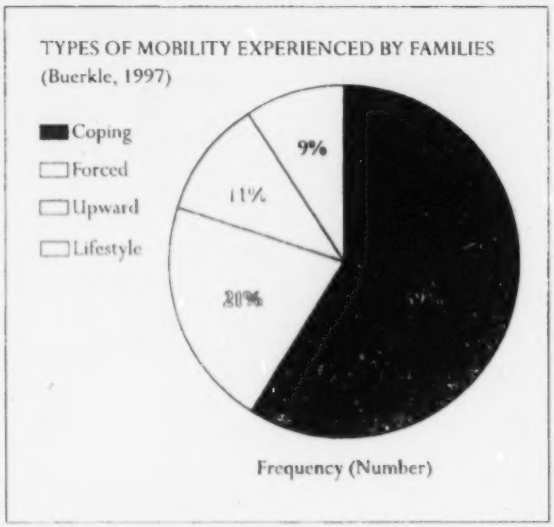
I don't want my kid to fail because of moving, but sometimes you just have to.

If moving has a negative effect on children, why do families move? Families said they moved for many reasons, but usually because they had no choice. Buerkle's study showed that families who move frequently often are dealing with many issues that impact their moves. Although some families in the study saw their move in a positive light, most families moved because they were wrestling with issues that create family instability as well as poor housing options.

Buerkle found that moves fell into four categories:

- *coping* (a move because of one or more factors, e.g., poor housing, abuse)
- *forced* (e.g., eviction)
- *upward* (e.g., a new job, a better home)
- *lifestyle* (e.g., "It's what we do.")

Coping Moves. Fifty-nine percent of the families interviewed were moving to *cope*—with substandard housing conditions, not being able to find housing they could afford, problems with landlords, bad relationships, abuse, chemical dependency, and other issues that destabilize families. They may have chosen to move, but did not feel in control.



We've always moved to cope—with awful conditions of houses and problems with slumlords. I saw mobility as a way to escape from bad relationships and try a new life...

Forced Moves. Some families are *forced* to move because of eviction, property condemnation, dangerous situations, their own behavior (e.g., chemical dependency). For these families, 21% in the study, there was no control and no choice involved.

For me, moving was always tied with drugs and not having any money to pay the rent, then going to a shelter. Now that I'm clean, I'm going to stay put, give my kids a place to stay. I hope we can make it.

Upward Moves. Some families in the study (11%) were positive about moving and saw their move as a chance to establish a better life with more stability for their children. Families were trying to build something better for themselves and their families, learning from bitter experiences in the past.

Past moves made me wiser...I'm more responsible and am buying a house. Moving now, when we're financially secure and could be planful, is so much better. This move is full of opportunity.

Lifestyle Moves. For a small percentage of families (9%), moving is a part of their *lifestyle*. They use moving as a way to escape problems or to generate excitement and change in their lives.

I like to move. I'm always on the go, seeing new people and places. When problems surface, and they always do, I'll just move again.

INADEQUATE HOUSING

Housing emerged as a major issue for families interviewed by Buerkle. Most families moved to try to find a better place to live.

We just move from one dump to another. I've been looking for a place for five months – landlords won't call me back, I just sit and wait by the phone. The few places I've seen have been dumps and unfit to live in...every place looks trashy. I don't want to live in a place like that. I have Section 8, but the deadline is coming up and I can't find a place to live. What should I do?

Most of the mobile families interviewed reported on the difficulty of finding a place to live that was in decent condition, safe, affordable, and available when they needed it.

Buerkle found that one third of the families she interviewed were living in temporary quarters, most often with extended families. Large families said that finding adequate housing is extremely difficult. Families reported long waits for subsidized housing.

In addition, some families want to get out of areas with high crime rates. Often, families are repeating a family pattern of mobility related to poverty, with substandard, dangerous housing and problems with landlords.

It's hard as hell. You can't get good, affordable housing...build low-income housing in good areas, in between nicer houses...

FAMILY INSTABILITY

Families new to the area reported being under a lot of stress related to their move, but even those who moved without the additional inconvenience of changing schools reported increased stress. Handling emotional and personal

HOUSING FACTS

- *Housing is usually considered affordable if it costs no more than 30% of one's annual income. In the Twin Cities metropolitan area 185,000 households with annual incomes below $30,000 pay more than this for housing.*
- *Only 36% of families living in poverty in the Twin Cities area receive housing assistance from the government.*
- *There are 68,900 renter households with annual incomes below $10,000 in the metropolitan area, but only 31,200 housing units with rents affordable at this income level.*
- *Very low-income renters face a particularly tight housing market.*
- *In the worst cases individuals and families who cannot afford housing become homeless. In one night the Minnesota Department of Economic Security found more than 3,900 people who were living in emergency temporary housing in the metro area. —Family Housing Fund, 1997*

changes, family changes, and children's transitions, not to mention the physical aspects of packing and unpacking, is difficult even when the move is positive.

It's really a hassle when you don't have enough money for moving, let alone bus fare. Don't know where your kid is going to go, don't know the neighborhoods, don't know if you're coming or going.

In many cases, stress was caused by multiple factors not easily separable from the move. Mobile families reported significantly more stressful events in their lives than did families who had been stable for more than two years. Ninety percent of the mobile families had experienced at least one family change event in the past year, with over 50% reporting a personal stress issue such as chemical dependency, death of a relative or friend, or legal problems.

..along with the custody battle, my dad dying, getting hurt at work, and dealing with that slumlord... Trying to figure out where to move has been frustrating because subsidized housing gives very limited options.

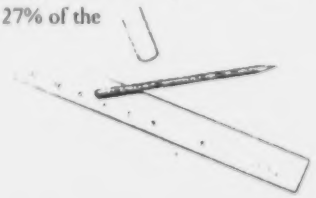
Buerkle's subjects reported varying levels of social support to help them deal with problems, with those new to the city feeling the most vulnerable. Families who moved within the metro area felt relatively more connected, finding support in schools, churches, or professional agencies. However, few of the families in the study reported high levels of support.

People and community aren't helpful. You can't get resources, information. You're reliant on people who don't help or aren't real helpful. There's too much restriction on resources.

For the highly mobile families, feelings of disconnection with the local community were tied to perceptions of danger in neighborhoods. They also think that there is no use making connections when their life experiences suggest that they will undoubtedly have to move again.

You learn not to depend on anyone or anything besides yourself. I feel sorry for those who rely on welfare, Section 8. When the system fails you, you need survival skills.

A small percentage of the families who felt some choice and control about moving reported more positive feelings. Some families were coming to Minneapolis to be near family and better job opportunities. Optimism about moving was reported by 27% of the families interviewed, with 21% reporting positive emotions.



FINDINGS

Buerkle's research targets several key factors that negatively affect families and children who move frequently:

- a lack of affordable and quality family housing;
- multiple stress factors that contribute to family instability coupled with the lack of an adequate support system; and
- poor school attendance.

Her study provides the human faces for the data in the Hennepin County analysis. Buerkle raised questions about how schools and social service agencies can help families cope more positively with mobility. Because problems accumulate to increase the negative impact of moving, multiple solutions may be necessary.

Improving housing options, including more subsidized housing and housing ownership opportunities, is one solution suggested by Buerkle. She also suggests developing a community base from which services can be accessed more easily by mobile children and families.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

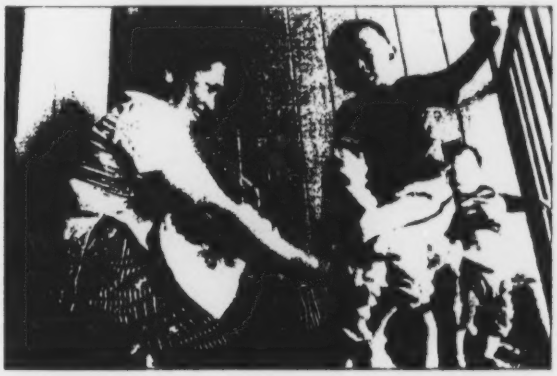
Research done for the Kids Mobility Project and elsewhere supports the conclusion that multiple factors impact student achievement. The Kids Mobility Project set out to see if frequent moving was one of those factors for Minneapolis Public School children. They discovered that mobility was indeed a factor affecting achievement. Two major reasons for frequent moves emerged:

- family instability and
- insufficient safe, affordable housing.

Family instability includes a wide range of conditions including poverty, chemical abuse, physical abuse, and divorce. These conditions lead to frequent moves as families adjust to change or cannot afford to pay for adequate housing. In addition, inadequate housing options often force families into a cycle of moving to escape substandard living conditions and problems with landlords.

Kids Mobility Project researchers also found that poor school attendance—a strong indicator of level of achievement—is linked to the high mobility caused by family instability and lack of adequate housing.

Improved stability for families, including affordable housing, is critical. So, what can be done? A one-size, fits-all solution is unrealistic given the unique characteristics of families. It is also clear that multiple and interrelated factors cause high mobility. It will take a concerted effort on the part of housing agencies, schools, social service agencies, community and religious organizations, and philanthropic and business groups to create multiple and interrelated solutions.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational, social service, and housing agencies must implement policies and practices that support:

- **Improving school attendance for all students, with particular attention to attendance issues related to families who are changing residence or are homeless.** Improved practices should include effective, proactive monitoring of student attendance at all schools; working with neighboring school districts to provide integrated transition policies as students move between districts; and other actions that affirm the educational focus of schools. The school district must continue policies that support families such as keeping students in the same school for the whole year, even when they move. The district needs to continue efforts to implement a core district curriculum and consistent standards, so that when students move, they easily understand what is expected of them in their new school.

- **Building and maintaining family stability by connecting people to resources in their neighborhoods.** Providing convenient support services for low-income families who have recently moved, as well as families already settled in the community, will reduce the likelihood that families will need to move as often.

- **Developing an increased supply of safe, quality, affordable housing throughout the metropolitan area.** There is an urgent need for more units that are large enough for families with children.

FURTHER RESEARCH RECOMMENDED

In addition to the above policies and practices, the participants in the mobility study have identified additional possibilities for research that could more clearly untangle the web of interrelated factors affecting families in transition. Such research might include, but not be limited to:

- Development and testing of targeted intervention efforts to help explain the interrelationship of variables shown to impact student outcomes, including reviewing the findings of the School Engagement/ Barriers to Learning Initiative underway in seven pilot schools in Minneapolis to connect community resources to support students and families.

- Research to identify and quantify relationships between inadequate housing and school achievement and/or other factors that impact housing, such as family stability and employment.

CONCLUSION

Much of the information gathered for the Kids Mobility Project confirms conclusions reached by others in our community about the best ways to strengthen neighborhoods and families. There are a number of promising initiatives underway such as the Neighborhood Revitalization Program, Minneapolis Redesign, and Alliance for Children and Families, as well as housing initiatives. School policies that support keeping students stable include community schools and keeping students in the same school for a year even when they move. The Kids Mobility Project work underlines the need to improve, intensify, and persevere in focused efforts.

This study, and others, point to a critical need to improve attendance. The whole community has a stake in school attendance. Schools must lead the effort, but they must involve the whole community in helping students and their families understand the importance of attendance and act on that knowledge.

New to the discussion of mobility is the force of the housing issue. Without more housing—adequate, safe, and better distributed housing—programs to strengthen families and neighborhoods are working with a great handicap. If families can experience stability in one aspect of their lives such as housing they have a better chance to begin, with the help of their communities, to build personal and family stability in other areas. Family stability also can be improved when social services and housing are linked.

Better housing, efficient delivery of social services and better school attendance are things that *can* be changed with focused interventions and integrated service on the part of multiple agencies.

Stable Housing + Stable Families + Stable Schools =
Better Educated Kids = Better Workforce = Better Minnesota

A Summary of
The Kids Mobility Report

Children who move frequently attend school less often and do less well on achievement tests than do children who do not move. This was the finding of a study by the Kids Mobility Project involving children in grades 1–6 in the Minneapolis Public Schools. The findings and recommendations for action are outlined below.

How Frequently Do Children Move?
During the six-month study period (1993-4), one in five children in the Minneapolis Public Schools changed residences at least once. Some children changed residences three or more times per year.

Why Do Some Families Move So Much?
Highly mobile families move for two reasons:

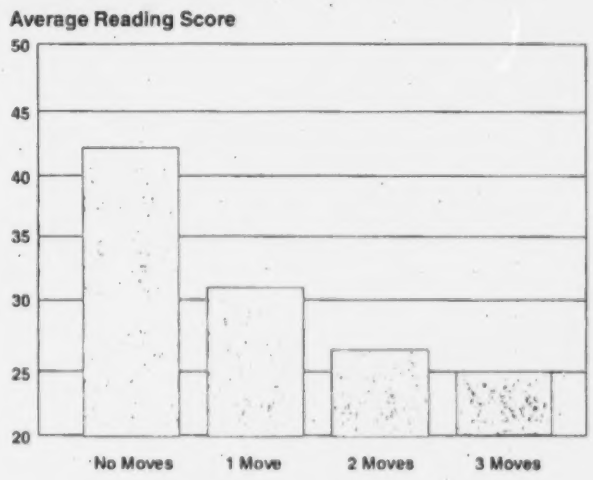
- To find housing that is more affordable, in better condition, closer to work or in safer neighborhoods.
- As part of dealing with personal or family problems such as divorce, abuse, etc.

Mobility Negatively Affects School Achievement
The more moves children make, the lower their average reading scores. Average reading scores for children with three or more moves during the year were nearly 20 points lower than those of students who did not move.

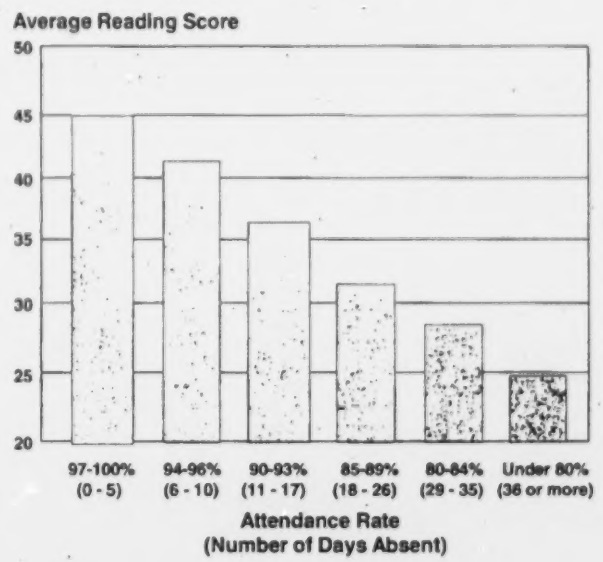
Mobility Negatively Affects Attendance
The more often students move, the worse their attendance rates. Students who did not move during the course of the study had an average attendance rate of 94 percent. Those with three or more moves dropped to an average rate of 84 percent.

Attendance is Strongly Related to Achievement
Students with nearly perfect attendance on average had reading scores that were 20 points higher than those who attended less than 84 percent of the time.

Reading Scores by Number of Residential Moves



Reading Scores by Attendance Rate

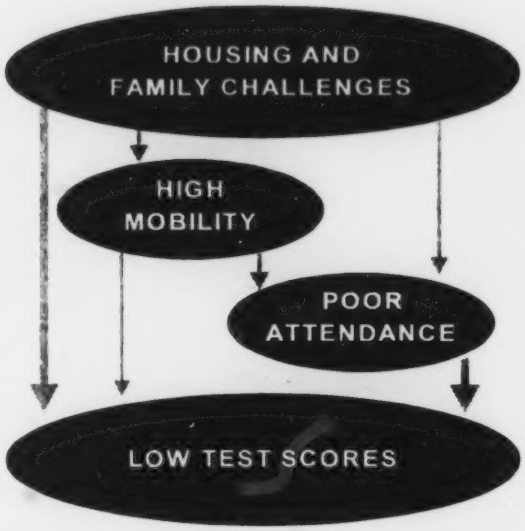


The Kids Mobility Project learned that:

- Lack of decent, affordable housing, compounded by family and personal challenges, is causing families to move frequently.

  "We have always moved to cope with the awful conditions of houses ... I saw mobility as a way to try a new life."

  "You can't get good affordable housing."



- Family mobility is keeping children from attending school and doing well.

  "I want stability for my child. I could see the change and how it was bad for her when we ... changed schools; it messed up her education and friendships."

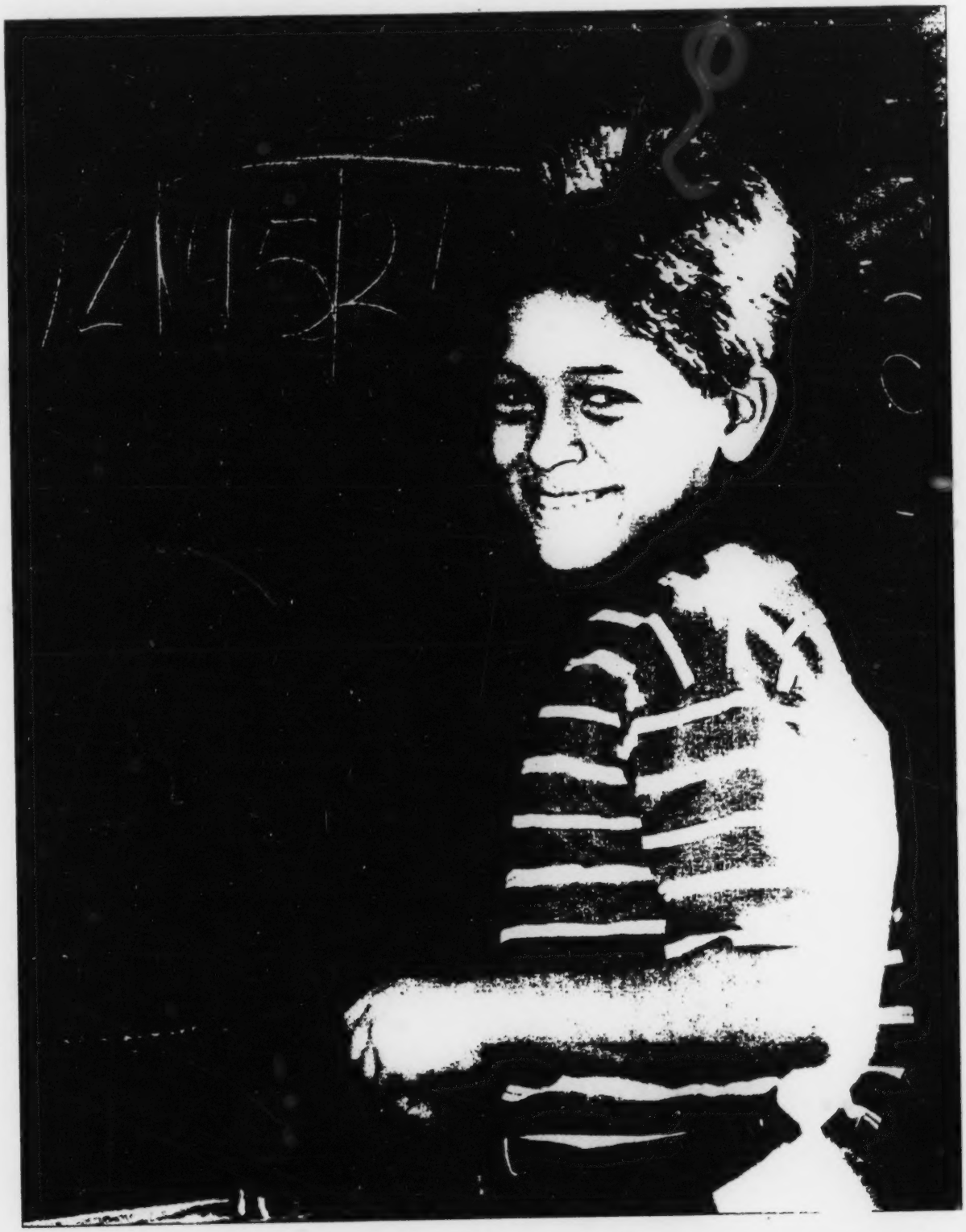
What can we do NOW to enhance the school performance of children in highly mobile families?

While we cannot prevent all of the personal challenges families face, we can:

- Emphasize and improve school attendance.
- Develop more safe, quality, affordable housing.
- Connect mobile families to resources in their communities. These include other families, neighborhood centers, faith organizations and social service agencies.

For copies of the full Kids Mobility Project report or for more information, contact Sally Westby, (612) 373-2011 (o); (612) 375-0625 (fax); e-mail SalWestby@aol.com.

Participants in the Kids Mobility Project included representatives of the Family Housing Fund; Hennepin County; the Minneapolis Public Schools; and the University of Minnesota (CURA, CAREI and the Department of Educational Psychology).



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